

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
March 25, 2014 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian J. Burket, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office

Others present:

Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects Inc.
Kenneth L. Pick, Berks County Community Development Office
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the March meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the March 25th agenda, as presented. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the March agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

MDJ 23-3-09 District Justice Office – sketch subdivision and land development plan [0:00.48]

Mr. Olsen introduced the project team. Mr. Pick explained that the Berks County Commissioners, in their evaluation of the County's 17 district justice courts (five within the City), are seeking a more-standardized model for the future needs – the facilities and their lease arrangements – in hopes of realizing a savings. They prefer a standard court design, with energy-efficient modernizations, hoping to complete three in 2014 and two more in 2015. He said nothing has been finalized, and they'll need to restudy the numbers after this initial investigative phase. Mr. Olsen said they've met with the court administrators, and studied their common facility needs. He described the intended floor plan of the courtrooms, incarceration rooms, interview rooms and public restrooms, in as tight and efficient a space as could be designed. He said they've included energy-conserving systems and materials in their proposal. Scott Miller described the orientation of the 'odd-shaped' property, between Kutztown Road, North 10th and Bern Streets, adding that utilities and the public stormwater system are already available, unlike some of the more-rural sites under consideration. A subdivision is proposed, for the County's purchase. They decided against an access from Kutztown Road, after considering the 'occupancy permitting' and the sight distances. He said they'd provide stormwater management and landscaping details with the next submission. Mr. Bealer noted the existing rail spur extending into the property from the 'Fairground Branch' on the north, and currently buried beneath the fill. Scott Miller said their preliminary deed research didn't indicate any right-of-way, but intended to research it further. Mr. Bealer questioned the reasoning in not facing the building's front toward one of the three street sides of the parcel. Mr. Olsen said it developed that way for the ease of access by the public, the employees and law enforcement, within the smallest footprint, for the budgetary goals. Scott Miller added that handicapped accessibility was another factor. Mr. Lauter explained that the Commission has discouraged the design of blank walls facing the public ways. Andrew Miller suggested additional fenestration on the 'sides'. Mr. Olsen noted a possibility of some clerestory windows, at least. He said they're leaning toward modular construction, and a three-site bid package, for construction by the year's end. Mr. Bealer suggested a 180-degree turn toward Bern Street. Scott Miller mentioned the existing slope and stormwater would complicate the matter, and require underground stormwater detention at an added expense. He said an initial design included a second driveway from Bern Street, but was deleted in consideration of the curb and sidewalk reconstruction already necessary. Mr. Olsen considered the possibility of a corner-facing vestibule to better engage the street, before Mr. Pick interjected that the floor plan itself was a final design. Mr. Lauter asked about the reception of the other municipal planning agencies, and the effect that might have on the 'standard design'. Andrew Miller asked if those boards will have had a first look before proceeding with the formal plan submission. Scott Miller said the Bern Township site requires a 100-foot setback, making it a somewhat different situation, but aiming for as much standardization as is otherwise achievable. Mr. Lauter advised the use of landscaping for the screening and aesthetic benefits. Andrew Miller agreed, and noted the industrial park setting and limited public travel on the North 10th Street side. He thought the western elevation might be screened by a future development on the balance of the parcel. Mr. Raffaelli suggested

faux windows as had been used on the 2011 'Bottom Dollar Food' project. Andrew Miller assumed the coming survey would yield better detail, and mentioned a 1923 (Gilt Edge Hosiery Mills Inc. & Herman P. Roeper) subdivision plan as a source of additional boundary detail. He asked if anything already known would restrict development of the residual parcel, and if the County would consider a shared access if an access from Kutztown Road were denied. Mr. Pick allowed for the possibility. Mr. Bealer suggested a driveway from Bern Street, by an existing curb cut. Scott Miller acknowledged the Planning Office's review letter, and intended to incorporate those comments into the next submission.

Other business:

§508.3 agreement to extension-Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area [0:25.00]

Andrew Miller said he's waiting on some clarifications of parcel ownership, and how that and the access easements proposed satisfy the conditions of their zoning variance. He said the erosion and sedimentation control plan approval has been renewed (Berks County Conservation District) and a highway-occupancy permit issued for the driveway (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation), but after the plan submission deadline. He said the engineer has provided another ninety days, but hoped it'd be settled in the next month.

Mr. Bealer moved to extend the review of the Jet Set plan, as requested in a March 21st letter emailed from the design engineer. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 1 to grant another 90-day extension of the 'Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area' plan, Mr. Raffaelli casting the dissent.

Resolution #3-2014

review the draft February 25, 2014 meeting minutes [0:26.57]

Mr. Bealer mentioned one requested correction, submitted earlier by an email. Mr. Burket moved to accept the February meeting minutes, as corrected. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 25th meeting minutes.

Resolution #4-2014

The Commission briefly discussed the finalized 2013 Annual Report, recent work observed at the Buttonwood Street Dollar General site, recent development and vacancies along Lancaster Avenue, the Redevelopment Authority's acquisition of the 'Riverfront Commerce Center', the excavation and grading for the DoubleTree Hotel, business pending before the Blighted Property Review Committee, plans for the third lot of the 'Buttonwood Gateway' development, and the use of a former gas station at 1925 North 5th Street.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the March meeting. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the March 25th meeting. – 7:41p